Crush of Georgia environmentalists line up behind EPA greenhouse gas regulations opposed by carbon polluters

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Body

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Representatives of Georgia nonprofit environmental groups were among those holding signs on Tuesday proclaiming 'Cut Climate Pollution' in front of the Environmental Protection Agency's headquarters in Washington D.C. The EPA received one million public comments on a rule designed to slash greenhouse gas emissions from fossil-fueled power plants. Photo courtesy of Climate Action Campaign

The Environmental Protection Agency's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel power plants has been endorsed by a crush of environmental advocates in Georgia.

By the end of Tuesday's public comment deadline, the EPA reported receiving more than 1 million responses across the nation to its proposed rule that is designed toreduce carbon pollution[1]from 2028-2042 by 617 million metric tons, or roughly half the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by half the cars in the U.S.

The rule would regulate power plants operated by Georgia Power and other utilities at fossil fuel facilities where coal and oil is burned in order to generate electricity. Georgia Power is shutting down the majority of its coal burning units over the next several years, determining that the aging coal producing units are no longer economically viable in the long term.

One of the groups endorsing the rule was Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, a partner of the Climate Action Campaign. The Decatur-based interfaith nonprofit reported that 661 Georgians, including 29 faith leaders, signed the federal register prioritizing public health and the environment.

According to the federal environmental agency, the new standards would prevent 1,300 premature deaths, 800 hospital and ER visits, 300,000 asthma attacks, and tens of thousands of lost work or school days.

The Georgia interfaith group argues that the new protocols would repeal the Trump-administration's carbon standard that limited the accountability for power plant owners for their role as a major source in climate change.

'The proposed standard would repeal the previous administration's carbon standard, known as the dirty-power scam, which did nothing to tackle climate change and let polluters off the hook,'states the comment[2]from Georgia Interfaith Public and Light. 'The EPA must listen to scientists' warnings about the urgent need for climate action and finalize the strongest possible plan to cut climate pollution by early next year.'

The Biden administration's policy is not without its detractors, including from the powerful Edison Electric Institute, an association that represents investor-owned electric companies that provide electricity to 220 million Americans.

Power plant owners questioned the viability of new technologies referenced in the regulation as ways to meet the pollution goals and said that the EPA regulations would be too burdensome on them to implement within the deadline.

The Edison Electric Institute asked the EPA to provide more time to respond to proposals to reduce carbon emissions that are 'inextricably bound up in our industry's ongoing cleanenergy transition, seeking both to reinforce

the progress already made in reducing carbonemissions and to accelerate the deployment of critical, but still developing clean energytechnologies.'
'Getting these rules right is essential to the continued provision of affordable, reliable, and clean energy to electricity customers across the country,' the trade association said in comments submitted in May.

Georgia Power officials have also noted strides made in lowering its carbon footprint over the last couple decades. Since 2007, Georgia Power's carbon emissions have decreased by 60% and the company has reduced other emissions by more than 95% since 1990.
In May, Drawdown Georgia, a statewide research-based initiative, found that overall greenhouse emissions in Georgiadeclined 5% from 2017 to 2021[3]largely due to Georgia's largest electric utility lessening its reliance on coal.
Currently, the majority of Georgia's largest carbon emitting plants are generating electricity using methane gas, although the coal burning Plant Bowen in Bartow County remains the biggest source of pollution.
This week, the Southern Environmental Law Center joined 28 other environmental organizations to support the EPA's proposal to limit carbon emissions.
'The South is particularly burdened by the fossil fuel industry. Southerners of color and folks living in lower-wealth communities are often disproportionally affected by air pollution and climate change,' saidJennifer Whitfield, a senior attorney at Southern Environmental Law Center. 'Limiting carbon pollution from coal and methane gas plants is a critical and necessary step towards moving states like Georgia away from fossil fuels and tackling the climate crisis.'
Coal ash saga continues

Georgia Power and its parent company Southern Co. have been embattled with the shifting environmental regulations proposed throughout President Joe Biden's first three years in office. The Biden administration's policies have run counter to the fossil fuel industry's preferred pro-business and utility emission cutbacks put in place under President Donald Trump's administration.
Trump and Biden have made starkly different arguments about the future of the oil industry and its long-term impact on climate change. During the 2020 campaign, Trump opposed environmental policies he said might harm businesses.
This EPA rule is the third time in nine years that the EPA is proposing different regulations on power plant greenhouse emissions under a provision in the Clean Air Act.
The Obama administration's 2015 Clean Power Plan — intended to cut carbon emissions from power plants — wasstruck down[4]by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Trump administration's replacement, known as theAffordable Clean Energy rule[5], was tossed by a federal court.
Clean energy activists have also been battling with Georgia Power and other utilities over thedumping of toxic coal ash[6]into unlined ash ponds that contaminate groundwater.
A recent court ruling in Alabama could carry ramifications in Georgia.
On Aug. 3, the EPA proposed denying Alabama Power's plan to dump millions of tons of coal ash into an unlined pit at one of its power plants in Alabama. Alabama and Georgia Powers' owner Southern Co. contends trucking the coal ash to inland landfills is too expensive,according to WKRG TV[7].
Georgia regulators are scheduled to decide in 2025 the timeline for Georgia Power to close itslast coal-fired power generator[8]located on the site of Bowen.
Georgia Power's Plant McDonough-Atkinson in Smyrna now produces enough electricity from natural gas to power 1.7 million homes.
The three natural gas units replaced coal-fired generators that were retired in 2011 at the plant site six miles northwest of Atlanta along the Chattahoochee River.
This story comes to Rough Draft via a media partnership with Georgia Recorder[9].
The post Crush of Georgia environmentalists line up behind EPA greenhouse gas regulations opposed by carbon polluters[10] appeared first on Rough Draft Atlanta[11].

[1]: https://georgiarecorder.com/2023/05/11/bidens-epa-proposes-tough-new-carbon-emission-limits-on-dirtiest-power-plants/ [2]: https://www.regulations.gov/comment/EPA-HQ-OAR-2023-0072-0161 [3]:

https://georgiarecorder.com/2023/05/19/georgias-air-polluted-with-fewer-emissions-as-coal-fired-electricity-production-winds-down/ [4]: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-1530_n758.pdf [5]: https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/affordable-clean-energy-rule [6]: https://georgiarecorder.com/2022/11/03/coal-plant-operators-shirking-responsibilities-on-ash-cleanup-report-contends/ [7]: https://www.wkrg.com/alabama-news/epa-temporarily-halts-alabama-powers-coal-ash-plan/ [8]: https://georgiarecorder.com/brief/sierra-club-study-finds-georgia-powers-bartow-county-coal-fired-plant-among-countrys-dirties/ [9]: https://georgiarecorder.com/ [10]: https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2023/08/10/crush-of-georgia-environmentalists-line-up-behind-epa-greenhouse-gas-regulations-opposed-by-carbon-polluters/ [11]: https://roughdraftatlanta.com

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